HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Board of Internal Economy

BOIE • NUMBER 008 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

TRANSCRIPT

Thursday, June 14, 2018

Board of Internal Economy

Thursday, June 14, 2018

● (1120)

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): The Board of Internal Economy is called to order.

The first items we have are the minutes and business arising from the previous meeting. Are there any issues with either of those, either the minutes or business arising from them?

Not seeing any, we'll go on to the next item, which is the 2017-18 year-end financial report. Presenting on this item is—

[*Translation*]

Joining us is Daniel Paquette, the Chief Financial Officer of the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

I am here today to present the 2017-18 Year-End Financial Report and to seek your approval to include the carry-forward of the operating budget into the 2018-19 supplementary estimates (A).

[*English*]

This financial report has been prepared using an expenditure basis of accounting, which is consistent with the Public Accounts of Canada, where these will be published this fall. This report provides the final authorities and expenditures for 2017–18, along with comparative information from previous fiscal years.

[*Translation*]

Parliament provides the House with authorities so that it can support members according to the usual parliamentary schedule. Authorities for 2017-18 in the amount of $513 million represent an increase of $44.8 million, or 9.6%, over the previous year's authorities.

The most significant changes involve the $21.6 million increase to the MP pension plan. There is also the $12.8 million increase for ongoing investments in the Parliamentary Precinct long-term plan and other major investments such as security enhancements in the West Block, the digital strategy to develop a modernized approach to the delivery of parliamentary information, the disclosure of members and House officers, and the expansion of the pay and benefits team.

Other changes include economic increases for various employees of the House administration, increases to the budgets of members and House officers, and increases to members' sessional allowances.

In 2017-18, expenditures total $490 million compared to $445 million in 2016-17. This increase of $45.5 million, or 10.2%, corresponds to the increase in authorities received in 2017-18.

[*English*]

The expenditures are also presented by type of costs. The most significant increase in expenditures for 2017–18 over previous years was the salary and benefits, which increased by $47.7 million. This increase was mainly due to a $25.2-million adjustment, as directed by the actuarial report on the pension plan for members of Parliament. This was offset by a decrease of $3.7 million due to the reduction of the employer contribution to the plan.

As well, significant investments were made in the staffing to support those major investments, such as the food service modernization and optimization of services, the House office expenditure disclosure, the digital strategy to modernize the delivery of parliamentary information, and the long-term vision and plan.

The other factors contributing to the increase in expenditures are the economic increases I previously mentioned, for which we had received the appropriation.

[*Translation*]

In addition, revenues for 2017-18 have changed significantly from 2016-17. Total revenues increased by $9.2 million, because of services provided to federal government departments and agencies and other parliamentary institutions, all on a cost-recovery basis. We also had a slight increase in revenues from caterers, cafeterias and the restaurant.

[*English*]

Finally, the report provides a comparison of the authorities to the expenditures for 2017–18. As mentioned, the total authorities were $513 million, while expenditures amounted to $490 million, leaving a surplus of $22.7 million. This amount corresponds to the lapse that will be reported in the Public Accounts of Canada. The surplus reflects the fact that the authorities received are intended to support 338 members. Due to the fact that by-elections were held in 11 constituencies during the past year, there were fewer members and less support was required, resulting in reduced spending overall.

[*Translation*]

The surplus represents 7.1% of the total estimates voted in 2017-18.

[*English*]

The House of Commons typically follows the government's practice of carrying forward any lapsed funds up to a maximum of 5% of the main estimates. Therefore, I'm seeking your approval to include a carry-forward of $15.9 million into the 2018–19 supplementary estimates (A), representing 5% of our year main estimates. As we do not expect to have any other items to include in our supplementary estimates (A), we are seeking the opportunity to get your approval here today for this carry-forward, instead of returning with a separate submission at a later meeting.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my presentation on the financial reports.

[*Translation*]

I am ready to answer any questions the members of the committee may have.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rodriguez, the floor is yours.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Chief Government Whip): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Paquette, it's always a pleasure to see you.

That sounds pretty standard. I just have one quick question. How does the current carry-forward compare to last year? I assume this also includes the 5% of members' office budgets that have not been spent and are carried forward. Is that correct?

● (1125)

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Yes, exactly.

Last year's carry-forward was $15.4 million and this year's is $15.9 million. The two amounts represent 5% of the voted items each year.

A large portion of this year's carry-forward, $6.9 million of the $15.9 million, represents the portion that will be transferred to members' budgets.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Strahl is next.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip): My question follows on that. It's never really clear. Perhaps I haven't paid enough attention. In my budget this year, I had $6,000 remaining. Is this what we're talking about when we talk about members of Parliament's unspent amounts that come back to House administration? It doesn't go back into general revenue, or anything like that.

I would like members to understand what happens to the monies that they do not spend as part of their total allocation.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: At this point here, our total surplus is some $22.2 million. That, in essence, is the money that we haven't spent this year. We don't spend what we don't need.

The full amount goes back into the central fund. The carry-forward is an additional authority that we ask, through our supplementary estimates, to be added to this year's appropriation. The full amount goes back to the central account, and we ask for the additional portion, of which a portion goes back to the members. We make sure to reinvest the other portion in activities or projects that are there to support the members.

Hon. Geoff Regan: The members' MOBs are part of that.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Yes.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Sorry.

Mr. Mark Strahl: In terms of percentages, what amounts did members of Parliament lapse or not spend, and what percentage did the House administration...? How do those compare in terms of percentages of available budgets? Were members of Parliament more frugal perhaps than even our colleagues in the House administration?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: It's difficult to say that the members may be more frugal.

The fact that we did have 11 by-elections this year means that those MOBs were less used than the other MOBs. For the carry-forward overall, the surplus for members is a little over 7%, while the one for the administration is around 3%.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: There were various contributing factors to that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: The members can't take all of the credit themselves, darn it.

Is there anybody else?

Is it agreed to accept the recommendation?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That is agreed.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Paquette.

[*English*]

The next item is guided tours of West Block by the Library of Parliament. We'll wait a moment while the presenters come up and the others leave.

Presenting on this from the Library of Parliament will be Catherine MacLeod, Assistant Parliamentary Librarian, and Benoit Morin, Senior Ddirector, Public Eeducation Programs.

Ms. MacLeod, when you're ready, the floor is yours.

Ms. Catherine MacLeod (Assistant Parliamentary Librarian, Library of Parliament): Honourable members of Parliament, it's my pleasure to address the board today regarding the plan for the visitor experience at the West Block after Centre Block closes. I'm accompanied by Benoit Morin, Senior Director, Public Education Programs.

The Library of Parliament is responsible for the provision of visitor services on behalf of Parliament. Although we're discussing West Block today, the public will also have an opportunity to visit the Senate and the Government Conference Centre.

Public access remains, as always, a high priority. Access to Parliament will continue throughout the rehabilitation of Centre Block. There are two ways for visitors to visit Parliament in person, both now and after the move. They may either take a guided tour or observe MPs at work from a seat in the gallery or at committee. Access to the public galleries for question period and debates will continue for visitors, including school groups, in the interim chamber. This follows the same procedures that are currently in place in Centre Block.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Guided tours of the West Block will be offered during the entire closure period, which is expected to last 10 years. Two separate experiences will be offered: one at the West Block and one at the Government Conference Centre. In both cases, the visits will focus on the role of the House of Commons and the Senate.

The visitor experience, particularly the reception, group assembly and guided tours, will be tailored to the new building. Overall, it is smaller than the Centre Block. That is why the guided tours had to be adjusted accordingly. This is important for parliamentarians because they must continue their activities.

I now invite Benoit Morin to go over the West Block visitor plan after the Centre Block closes.

[*English*]

Mr. Benoit Morin (Senior Director, Public Education Program, Library of Parliament): Today, guided tours include stops in the Senate and the House of Commons chambers, the foyers, the Hall of Honour, and the Library of Parliament. Tours only stop in the chamber and foyer when the House of Commons is not sitting. Similarly, guided tours will be offered in West Block and will include the interim chamber of the House of Commons with stops in the public gallery and on the chamber floor. Tours will also visit a committee room and learn about the transformation of the heritage building.

To adjust to the differences presented by West Block that Catherine mentioned, guided tours will occur when the House of Commons is not sitting, and the Senate tours will follow the same principle as in the Government Conference Centre for two reasons.

First, there will be a space restriction, especially in common space areas. The West Block was originally built in the late 1880s as a working office building without the intention of having it shown to the public and without consideration for the unique requirements of different users, such as parliamentarians, tour groups, and staff. The areas to be visited by the public are next to and intertwined with the other working spaces, making it a challenge not to affect business traffic and parliamentary affairs.

Second, tours being offered in Centre Block currently stop by the chamber only when it's not in use. This works well in Centre Block, because visitors are shown the highly recognized Hall of Honour and the iconic main library building in lieu of the chamber and the foyer. In West Block, when parliamentarians are debating in the interim chamber, there will be no alternate key viewing points for visitors to compensate for not visiting the chamber. We have planned for this.

The hours for guided tours will be extended and expanded on weekends, break weeks, and during the summer.

[*Translation*]

These changes will be communicated in a number of ways, including news releases, updates on the visitors' website and on social media, to ensure that parliamentarians and other stakeholders are well informed.

The Library remains the main point of service for parliamentarians and is available to provide personalized services, answer questions about the services provided and assist them.

An electronic ticketing system will be launched to facilitate the booking of visits, from a mobile device, for example. If they so wish, employees of members' offices may continue to consult with reservation officers to facilitate reservations for their constituents. As for groups of students, they can always book visits of a general nature or based on their school program.

We will run our activities from the new Visitor Centre, which will be adjacent to the West Block. This new underground facility will become the main gateway for visitors to enter the temporary facilities.

In this modern underground complex, there will be visitor spaces, including a larger Parliament store.

● (1135)

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: The Library of Parliament has been working diligently with its partners to redesign how we welcome visitors to Parliament Hill on your behalf so that they continue to have a high-quality experience during the Centre Block closure.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting us to appear before you today. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Rodriguez, the floor is yours.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here.

I look at the pictures and I think it's beautiful. It will be really beautiful.

I'm wondering about the impact of all this on the visits, particularly by students. This is an important part of their education. If I understand correctly, visits will no longer be possible when the House is in session. Is that correct?

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: That's correct.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Do you have any idea how many visits that take place while the House is sitting compared to when it is not sitting?

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: We have done that analysis and the level of access will be the same as it is now. However, visits will be distributed differently throughout the year.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay. There will therefore be many more visits during adjournment periods, when we are in our ridings.

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: Exactly.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: How many seats will there be in the galleries compared to the current number?

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: I'll ask our partners to answer that question.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): There will be 346 seats in the West Block, whereas there are currently 581 in the Centre Block. This represents a 40% reduction in the number of seats in the galleries.

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's 581 and—

Mr. Michel Patrice: —and 346 in the new one.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Brosseau, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to thank

[*Translation*]

Ms. MacLeod and Mr. Morin for their presentations today.

[*English*]

I know for members of Parliament, the work we do in the House of Commons is very, very important, but I think we are ever so proud when we can have our constituents and especially youth come up and see us work in the galleries or at committee. I know there's a 40% reduction in the number of seats in the new House of Commons we'll be moving to at a date we'll determine later on, but I think what is important, also, is the accessibility. Right now, if you're in a wheelchair, getting access to the chamber or galleries is very difficult or not possible at all.

Could you maybe explain how there will be limited seats but how it will be more accessible to Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: I'll ask Mr. Patrice to answer your question.

[*English*]

Mr. Michel Patrice: There will be six accessibility seats in the new galleries, so it's quite significant if you compare that to the existing galleries where, effectively, there is a problem.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Approximately how many people come to the galleries yearly? Is that something we keep track of? When we're in the House, we often look up, and they are full during question period, but for other debates, they're not.

Mr. Michel Patrice: It's not a number that is tracked, but as you rightly point out, for question period, particularly on Wednesdays, the galleries get quite full.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Perfect.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

The question about the reduced capacity has been answered. I think those of us who have had the opportunity to tour the facility under construction recognize that the new Visitor Welcome Centre is quite expansive. It's very large. In the building itself, there is not a single hallway that's as wide as any of the hallways that are in Centre Block. There's just less room. All of the offices reflect that, but we still do want to make sure that we maintain access. I think that's probably why you're here. There were some media reports that indicated that things were changing drastically; I'm glad to hear that there will be provisions made.

I have a couple of questions. As far as I know, the visitor experience is, basically, internal; it's all inside of the buildings. In Ottawa the weather is unpredictable sometimes, so it's easier to be inside, but has there has been any thought about providing more of a grounds type of tour to give that visitor experience?

Second, I understood from my last walk through that—I'm not sure if this is you or the buildings people—the books of remembrance were going to be brought down from the chapel, which I think is a great thing that they'll do. People will come to see those. I know we can't get access to the Library of Parliament while we're under construction, and it is the crown jewel, I think, of these buildings, so that's truly unfortunate. Could you talk about those two things—doing something on the grounds, and making adjustments to make sure people get an experience similar to what they get today?

● (1140)

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: I'll start, and I'll invite Benoit to elaborate.

I understand that the memorial books will be available in an appropriate setting in the Visitor Welcome Centre following Remembrance Day. The timing may be a little later, but that could be confirmed.

It's very important to continue to have a rich experience that helps visitors appreciate Parliament, your role, and the history of Parliament. We work with partners such as Heritage Canada, and they're currently responsible for the outdoor tours. I will ask them to elaborate a little on that in terms of plans going forward.

Mr. Benoit Morin: As Catherine just mentioned, the Department of Canadian Heritage already does programming on the grounds. They offer guided tours that relate to the history of the site and also they have, as you may know, the sound and light show, for instance.

To go back to providing a comparable experience, we will also feature Centre Block in a mini video exhibit in the Visitor Welcome Centre. That showcase will remain accessible, in addition to the Books of Remembrance.

Mr. Mark Strahl: When a visitor presents himself at the current Visitor Welcome Centre across Wellington Street, are they offered both the guided tour inside and the Canadian Heritage programming? Do visitors know they have both those options?

Mr. Benoit Morin: Yes, that information is readily available.

Mr. Mark Strahl: That will continue. Okay, thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I gather the National Capital Commission, which is under Canadian Heritage, provides the tours of the grounds. Is that correct?

Mr. Benoit Morin: That mandate of the National Capital Commission was transferred to the Department of Canadian Heritage. It used to be with the NCC and it's now with DCH.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I see. Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, Madam Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you for the presentation.

I know the conversation will have to take place after this, but I want it to be on the record to say that as we make a decision, to make sure we share information with the public so they are well aware of when they will no longer be able to tour Centre Block. I would assume an influx of visitors will want to try to make it here prior to that time.

I have had a lot of requests from my constituents to visit me. I can only imagine what you'll be going through.

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Monsieur LeBlanc.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the presentation.

I think all of us who have constituents or colleagues who have been able to interact with the guides, the staff the library hires to do the tours, will share my experience, which has been that they are a remarkable group of young women and men. It's a credit to the library and to Parliament that we're able to offer that high-quality service. Visitors I've had a chance to talk to are consistently impressed with the people they meet, and you can pass that on to your colleagues.

As we were discussing, at this time of year we all have school groups. I met one yesterday from a village called Cap-Pelé in my riding in New Brunswick. A bunch of grade 8 kids were here. It's a very busy time of year, and that's probably a function of why booking these tours and so on has to be done so far in advance. As Bardish said, because the Centre Block will likely be closing, the pressure has probably increased the demand on the services.

I like your idea in your presentation of extending the hours, simply because I have the anecdotal impression that a lot of groups would accept to come at a later time of the day or earlier in the day if they could get access. With the restrictions in the West Block that colleagues have talked about, I think that's going to be even more important.

As we see what it looks like after a year of operation, I guess you'd have to come back to this table. The funding issue is always of concern, but I think we should keep a very alert sense to the pressure in demand that's going to come and look at whether it's possible to extend the hours even further than what you're planning or to have additional staff during some of those extended hours.

I think we miss opportunities sometimes, and it's nobody's fault. It's a reality of Parliament's sitting late in the evenings, the security context. I think we should look for maximum opportunities to increase the access as we gain a sense of the first year of the new operation in the West Block, for example. This is a suggestion.

● (1145)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Is there anything else, colleagues?

[*Translation*]

The next item is the Parliamentary Precinct long-term vision and plan.

The witnesses appearing today on this topic are from the House of Commons. We welcome Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk of the Administration, Stéphane Aubé, Chief Information Officer, and Susan Kulba, Senior Director of the House of Commons Architecture and Long-Term Vision and Plan Program Management.

Mr. Patrice, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Mr. Chair and members of the Board, thank you.

I will start the presentation with the end.

We recommend that the move of operations from the Centre Block take place during the winter adjournment period and that the transition of some members' offices from the Centre Block to the Justice, Confederation and Wellington buildings begin this summer.

[*English*]

How did we get there? We made this recommendation after a thorough review of the status of the project and an analysis of the risks, both potential and real. Our review included a series of discussions with our partners, particularly Public Services and Procurement Canada, in which the available data and information gathered on the project was closely assessed with the required due diligence. All the partners involved understood that a good measure of healthy challenging had to occur. Our common objective is to ensure that the House of Commons transitions seamlessly to the West Block. After all, this is not a typical office facility; it is the seat of our democracy.

I should say that we make this recommendation based on the overall assessment, not out of concern for any particular activity, as it is the sum of all the parts that is important to consider. There are so many moving parts that to assume that everything will go according to plan, leaving no room for error, would not be responsible as the date of the return of the House in September cannot be ignored. Collectively, the partners are all on the same page, meaning that the project is not schedule-driven but operationally driven. The new facilities must function as we expect them to and as they should.

[*Translation*]

To update you on the situation, and to assist you in your decision-making, I have divided the presentation into four themes: project overview, construction, technology and security integration—the security portion will be presented in camera—and impact and next steps.

The West Block rehabilitation project has taken place over approximately eight years. The condition of the building had deteriorated considerably, and it was high time that such a project was carried out. When it reopens, the building will accommodate the interim House of Commons Chamber and other legislative functions currently housed in Centre Block, while that building undergoes equally essential renovations.

[*English*]

In addition, phase one of the new Visitor Welcome Centre will serve as the public access point to Parliament. The scope of the West Block rehabilitation project also included plans allowing for the creation of new space, acknowledging the fact that the facilities would serve not only the needs of the current Parliament, but also of those in the decades to come.

The size of the West Block building in 2010 was approximately 15,000 square metres. In 2018, the West Block is now roughly 26,000 square metres, including the courtyard infill and other additions. The Visitor Welcome Centre, phase one, is an additional 5,700 square metres. Together they provide a total area of 31,700 square metres, effectively doubling the space originally available.

Technology includes 500 kilometres of copper cabling, 30 kilometres of fibre optic cable, over 10,000 data ports, 360 Wi-Fi access points, a large number of swipe-card access doors and security cameras, and over 100 equipment racks supporting that technology.

The general contractor, PCL, has done a tremendous job under the leadership and direction of PSPC. At times this past winter there were more than 1,000 workers on site, working night shifts and weekends.

On May 31, the building received special occupancy permits from the City of Ottawa, which means that certain portions of the building are now accessible without the need of protective gear. Major construction is now complete, and many key milestones have been achieved. Other construction activities are still ongoing and are expected to finish this summer.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

The interim Chamber is currently undergoing technology integration. Landscaping around the building is projected to be completed by early September. In addition, this summer we will begin to identify and correct what we call the flaws. A flaw can be something as minor as a dent in a wall or a damaged piece of furniture that needs repair. More major material or equipment problems may also require adjustments.

[*English*]

We are moving into the home stretch. The technology and security integration phase is going full steam ahead. As you may recall from the March update on the project, the House of Commons team started, in parallel with the completion of the construction, to integrate 21st century technology into this 19th century heritage building. Initially the plan was to start the integration after the construction was completed. The importance of these activities and the associated simulation and testing are the key reasons behind today's recommendation.

This section of the presentation will be divided in two parts. In public we will cover the status of non-security related technology integration, and in camera we will present the integration status of the facility's security components.

In addition to housing the interim chamber, West Block will also have multi-purpose rooms for committee meetings, broadcast and video conference capability, and caucus meetings; an office for the administration staff directly involved in chamber operations; and an office for House officers. The Visitor Welcome Centre will serve as the new secure point of entry for visitors and as an interpretation centre, as you heard earlier, for the Library of Parliament and its souvenir boutique.

[*Translation*]

Full testing of the broadcast and audio systems is underway in some committee rooms. The audio system in the interim Chamber is currently being integrated.

The expected completion date for this work is between late July and mid-August 2018. At that time, we will conduct a full simulation, including testing and adjustments as required.

Broadcast cameras and lighting in the House are also being tested.

[*English*]

As you may already know, we held a dry-run exercise in the interim chamber on June 6. This particular simulation was not part of the initial plan, but we felt we needed to gather more data in preparation for this meeting. The main purpose of the exercise was to test the broadcasting system and acoustics. For this test, staff were invited to occupy seats in the chamber and gallery to assess how the equipment would perform in a live situation.

In addition to varying degrees of vibration in some of the cameras, the exercise showed that broadcast lights required adjustment. This was to be expected. It demonstrates the importance of testing and reminds us to be diligent.

With respect to the committee rooms, the broadcasting system and cameras will also require further testing within the next few weeks to determine whether similar issues still need to be addressed. We will also conduct more simulations from July to September to ensure that the technology remains stable and that the solutions identified are performing as planned in a live environment.

I will now present the status of the work on the security front. We will need to proceed in camera.

● (1155)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay.

I'm afraid we'll have to suspend for a moment to go in camera for this part of the meeting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

[*Public proceedings resume*]

● (1215)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Is there anything further in the presentation?

Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Patrice: Following our in camera discussion on the current status of the project in terms of security, I will now turn to the operations of the building and all its systems. This section covers security systems as well as other technologies.

[*English*]

In camera we talked about the scope and complexity of the security system's features and various components. With respect to the operation of the House, we transmit the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees to Canadians in real time and support MPs in their roles as legislators.

The robust technology that is required to support these activities in a 21st century building necessitates an equally robust series of tests and simulations to ensure the proper functioning of the interim House and its proceedings. At this stage in the project, meeting a mid-September end date would require accelerating the transition and going live without conducting some of these planned tests. We feel that this would increase the risk of a failure to an uncomfortable level. I will repeat: this is not a typical office building.

To be clear, moving the operation of the House of Commons over the winter adjournment also carries some risks for Centre Block. As we all know, this building is not in top shape and needs significant repairs and upgrades. However, these needs are a known quantity, and our assessment is that it can continue to operate with the occasional Band-Aid solution should the need arise.

Another impact of the recommendation is the potential escalation in construction costs associated with the Centre Block project.

Construction cost escalation is defined as change in the costs of material and labour over time. In plain language, it means that if you defer a purchase of goods or services, it is expected that when you decide years later to make that purchase, that price will have gone up. It's not an out-of-pocket expense in the short term; however, failing to take appropriate measures to offset that potential escalation in cost may have an impact toward the end of the project. Accordingly, we have already opened discussions with our partners to implement measures that would prevent this cost escalation.

[*Translation*]

First, the West Block project was a learning experience for us. We have discovered and implemented a new approach to integrating technology, which allows us to reduce turnaround time as work progresses.

We are also exploring the possibility of initiating further investigation of the Centre Block as originally planned. After discussions with the various parties, I am sure that we will be able to begin the transition of some offices and functions from the Centre Block this summer, so that certain sections of the building can be investigated.

[*English*]

I would like to close by acknowledging that the West Block project is one of the largest rehabilitation projects for a heritage building in Canada. This project could not have been accomplished with this level of success without the hard work and commitment of the dedicated project team from the House administration, digital services and real property, and the parliamentary precinct branch of PSPC, as well as other supporting partners.

Obviously, it has been challenging, and we have had our share of surprises. Anyone who has lived through a renovation project can relate to that. We are proud of the results. West Block is an architectural gem, and it has the most modern features available. We are excited and look forward to beginning the transition to full operation.

With this recommendation, I feel we can confidently move into the final phase of our transition to the interim chamber. Then we will embark on what will be the largest rehabilitation of a heritage building in Canada, the Centre Block.

[*Translation*]

My team and I are ready to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Thank you for that presentation and the information.

Just towards the end, I understand that we could move, but in a phased-out approach that would have members of Parliament moving to other offices in the precinct, and then the chambers could follow once the West Block was fully ready to go, and that would be good.

I do wonder about the cost to the public purse. With the phased-out approach, it does actually make sense to phase it out and move a part, and then get some work started, and then move the rest when West Block is done. There's no point in everything having to be around West Block when other offices are available, but it does concern me when it comes to the cost to the taxpayer. Would there be additional costs?

● (1220)

Mr. Michel Patrice: No. That is a concern of ours too, and Public Services and Procurement Canada. We had discussions, and I understand from PSPC that proceeding in this fashion actually negates any construction escalation costs.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: There will be no new costs.

Mr. Michel Patrice: There will be no new costs, because there is no delay to the Centre Block project.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Excellent.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: That's good to hear. I think the number that was floated in the media was an estimated $11 million a month because of the delay. That surprised me, because I would think that the project could make up three months of delays over a 10-year period. You'd hope that it could be built back in, so I'm glad to hear that.

Certainly there's no sense in rushing this building. While it has its internal problems, which those of us in here are aware of, it still functions. It's still secure. It's still a beautiful building that we can use until the new one is ready.

I do have some concerns, though. When the summer recess was the target for the move, you were looking at 11-plus weeks available for the transition. When you go to the winter break, it's five or six, so that's a really compressed timeline. Speaking of making up three months over a year, I'm wondering whether—and this might be something for the House officers to talk about—we should be looking at giving you an extra week in January, and making up that time ourselves in a compressed calendar. Would that be helpful?

I don't want us to get into a scenario in which we sit until the 15th of December, for instance, and we're back the last week of January. That's a really compressed timeline, and I want some assurances that we don't make the mistake of....

Does that give you enough time to make the full transition? I guess that's my question.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I'm confident in terms of the new proposed approach that six weeks is quite sufficient, especially if you take into account that we're going to move some members out of this building starting this summer. That means less will need to be done during that period. What will remain in terms of moving will in a way be minimal compared to an election, let's say, when there are 338 members to move.

I'm quite satisfied and confident that this would be sufficient. I'll take note of the suggestion, and should we feel we're a week short, let's say, we'll have opportunities to come before the board in the fall to ask for that. That being said, I'm quite confident, and my team is also very confident, that six weeks is more than sufficient.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Okay.

I assume we will be coming back to the board again in December. I can't see, if we're close now, how we wouldn't be ready for that.

Will we have another go or no go meeting in December or November, or this is it?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I don't feel that it would be necessary.

I think if you approve this recommendation, that will be sufficient. Obviously we'll update you during our board meetings in the fall as to how it is unfolding.

● (1225)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You'll also tell us how the various tests are going, I presume.

Mr. Michel Patrice: That's right.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Monsieur...Rodriguez. It's easier to say in French.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I apologize, sir.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Good afternoon, everyone.

Personally, I see this rather as a progressive move that is starting now.

I have had the opportunity to visit the offices that are available now, three or four times. We were there together last week. We made a plan for the move and it should start now. I assume that everyone is going to do the same thing.

For example, we know that there are 11 members and eight ministers here. As for the 11 members, we have already decided which offices they will occupy. The same goes for the ministers. It's all ready now and we are waiting for the offices that we visited to be renovated.

For me, the move starts now and finishes when the rest of the Centre Block moves. This is a responsible and realistic process that is saving a lot of money in this case. After the summer, no one will be left here. We will all have moved, except the officials.

Are there other services that could also be moved in the meantime? I have no idea, but it could be printing services, for example. However, other things can also be done progressively so that we end up—

Mr. Michel Patrice: That is exactly part of the analysis that we are going to do on the administration offices, to see what we are able to move out of the building. The important thing for us is to keep administration services that are tied to the work of the Chamber close to it.

We are going to conduct that exercise too, on the same basis as you are going to look into the offices for your members.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Brosseau, you have the floor.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation and your recommendation.

[*English*]

I wanted to know more about training. We have amazing security guards on the Hill, and we have the RCMP on the outside. This is a gradual move that we'll be starting over the summer, so could you maybe explain a little bit more about the training that would go on? How would the PPS be able to get into the building and start making sure they're ready for December and January?

Ms. Susan Kulba (Senior Director, Architecture and LTVP Program Management Directorate, House of Commons): When we bring a new building online, PPS are the first occupants of that building. They bring all their forces through the building, and they do exercises and they familiarize themselves with the facility, so that by the time we actually bring any other occupants in, they're fully knowledgeable about the building. They have their operating procedures down pat, and they're ready to function fully before we bring anybody in.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: In the new building we have 300-and-some cameras. How many security cameras do we have in this building?

Hon. Geoff Regan: This is a question that we would discuss in camera, so to speak.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Okay.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Would you like to save that for another time, or would you like us to go back in camera?

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: No, no; sorry.

I want to talk about sitting late, at this time of year, at the end of session. One area where we've seen changes over the last few years is in the number of younger parents in the House of Commons. I know that this building is going to have a room dedicated to parents, with change tables and bathrooms. Is that something that will be happening?

Ms. Susan Kulba: Yes, the West Block will have a family room quite close to the chamber for that type of activity. There's a meditation room in the West Block as well.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Anything else, colleagues, on this before I ask if you wish to...? I guess I'll ask you now. Do you wish to accept the recommendation? Is it agreed to accept the recommendation?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's agreed. Okay.

The next item is the committee's annual report. Colleagues, at tab 6 you have before you a letter from the chair of the Liaison Committee, Ms. Sgro, who wishes to inform the board that the Liaison Committee recently adopted and presented to the House its latest annual report on committee activities and expenditures for the 2017-18 fiscal year. Ms. Sgro submitted a copy of the report to the board, and as well indicated that she would be available to meet at a future date if the board so desires.

By the way, I should thank the presenters for the last item.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 121(4), the Board of Internal Economy shall cause to be tabled in the House an annual comprehensive financial report, outlining the detailed expenditures of every committee.

Since June 2014, according to established practice, the annual report of the Liaison Committee is approved by the Board and tabled by the Chair, in order to comply with the requirements of the Standing Order.

[*English*]

Accordingly, if the board is in agreement, I shall present the attached report to the House as the board's report, pursuant to the standing order.

Are there any comments about that, or questions? Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's agreed, then.

[*Translation*]

We will now deal with the annual report on the House of Commons Policy on Preventing and Addressing Harassment for 2017-2018. Our witness is from the House of Commons. He is Pierre Parent, Chief Human Resources Officer.

Thank you very much for being here, Mr. Parent.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Parent (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As Chief Human Resources Officer, I am responsible for providing the Board of Internal Economy with an annual report on the House of Commons Policy on Preventing and Addressing Harassment.

I would therefore like to present the third annual report, which covers the period from April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. As you must know, the policy was adopted by the Board on December 9, 2014, and applies to members and House officers as employers, their employees, and employees of research offices. Paid and unpaid interns and volunteers are also covered by the policy.

[*English*]

During this period, we processed 35 cases. Of those, 28 were inquiries only, while seven were formal complaints. Three cases were formally investigated; one was substantiated, one was partially substantiated, and one was not substantiated. Two cases were resolved outside the policy, and two cases were deemed not receivable as the complaints did not meet the policy's definition of harassment.

Here are some observations for this year.

Members of Parliament are contacting us more and more for preventive advice, which is good news. Before addressing issues, they call or email us to ask us about best practices, help, and assistance. Members are also contacting us for training sessions. Actually, there's one taking place tomorrow with four offices, so the person is actually travelling there today. These are training sessions on harassment prevention for the employees.

Training is one of the great prevention tools in the matter of harassment, and multiple in-class sessions were provided this year. As for the board decision of March 1 making in-class sessions mandatory for all members, over 300 members have attended the course called "Strengthening a Culture of Respect—From Awareness to Action". A session intended for members' staff is also being developed and will be offered in the fall of 2018.

[*Translation*]

The online training is also a good tool, and I am pleased to report that, as of March 31, 687 people had reported having taken the training. It was a voluntary statement.

I am ready to answer any questions the members of the Board may have.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much, Mr. Parent.

Mr. Strahl, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, Monsieur Parent.

Based on what you've told us in terms of how many inquiries are coming, as you said, there's expansion, and people are contacting you more often. Is your level of support in staffing and so on sufficient to meet the needs of the members and staff who are contacting your office?

Mr. Pierre Parent: Right now it is not quite sufficient, but I've received the go-ahead for one person to come on board in two weeks, and we'll have two others in the coming months, because of the volume.

These numbers don't necessarily show the work that's being done behind the curtains. For instance, we're calling some of these informal cases "inquiries", but some of these inquiries require more hours than some of the formal complaints do. There's a lot of work involved, and staff usually assigned to other HR duties within the administration are now focused on some of these cases. I'm talking about, for instance, conflicts, HR issues that may raise a claim of potential harassment, but it's more of a labour relations issue, so we become involved from that perspective.

● (1235)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Rodriguez.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you very much, Mr. Parent.

Mr. Speaker, as whip, I have the privilege of working with Mr. Parent on a very regular basis. He and his team provide us with excellent service, particularly in the case of the training that was taken by all MPs and ministers, including the Prime Minister.

Mr. Parent, the #MeToo movement has brought about a structural change, which was needed and which shook things up in many respects. How did you greet this impact? How does it translate into the way people approach you or use your services? How have things changed?

Mr. Pierre Parent: Thank you for your question.

The #MeToo movement hit us somewhat belatedly. It started in society in general in October, and hit us around January.

There are requests and complaints, but basically it shows that MPs in general need structure and advice on human resources management. We are studying ways to support them that are different from what we used in the past. The need for advice on human resources management is increasingly evident because of the sensitive nature of these issues, especially when they start to get media coverage.

As I said in my report, there is now the prevention aspect. Some MPs call us to report that there is a problem in their office. Without any complaints, they see that something is going on and would like us to advise them to solve the problem.

There were no such requests before the #MeToo movement.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay. So there is a definite benefit to the proactive aspect of things. People are learning and better informed. They are also able to act earlier, which is very good.

Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Are there any other comments or questions? I see that there aren't.

Thank you very much, Mr. Parent.

Mr. Pierre Parent: Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: The next item requires us to go in camera again. We'll suspend for a few moments in order to do that. It's on employment documents for employees of members of Parliament.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: http://www.ourcommons.ca

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : http://www.noscommunes.ca